

# Public Health and Medicine exhibit

Brussels World Fair

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**A**N EXHIBIT on public health and medicine in the United States was on display at the Brussels World Fair between August 18 and October 19, 1958. Housed in three buildings adjacent to the main American Pavilion, the exhibit was designed and built by the Public Health Service.

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Its purpose was to tell the story of progress in American health during the past several decades with some emphasis, as well, on the unfinished tasks that lie ahead.

A display on American health was considered important for several reasons:

First, how a nation provides for the health of its people is a significant gauge of how that nation lives. In Dr. Howard Rusk's phrase, "The emphasis we place on dignity and service for our sick and handicapped is [also] a hallmark of life in America."

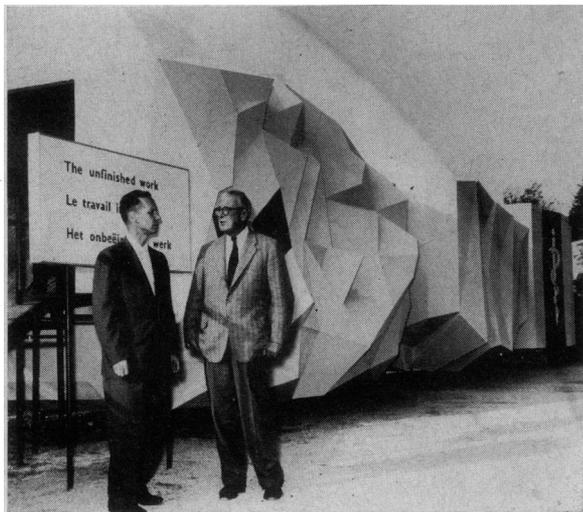
Second, the story of American accomplishments in health is exportable. Health techniques, methods, knowledge, and facilities developed in the United States are now being used in many parts of the world. We are al-

ready contributing substantially to health throughout the world, and President Eisenhower has suggested that we seek ways to increase that contribution.

The Brussels fair presented an opportunity to tell that story. The objective, therefore, was not only to show what we do in health and how we do it, but to illustrate the enormous potential which the export of American ideas and techniques in health holds for people in other nations.

Two further points about this exhibit should be mentioned. First, exhibits are not the only nor necessarily the best method of presenting American accomplishments in health to the world. All the techniques of public education and health information could—and should—be employed if we are to do a really significant job on the world scene.

Second, the Brussels exhibit cannot be considered a prototype of exhibits abroad. For example, it was necessary to fit the story into a physical structure designed for another purpose. From mid-April until mid-July the three buildings, used ultimately for the health display, had housed an exhibit on unfinished



Outside the public health and medicine exhibit at the Brussels World Fair are Dr. Leroy E. Burney, Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, and (right) Dr. Thurston J. Davies, executive director of the American Pavilion. The panel inscription, like all signs and captions in the pavilion, is in English, French, and Flemish.

tasks in the United States, specifically on man in relationship to man, on man in relationship to nature, and on man in relationship to his environment. Moreover, events obliged us to design and develop most of the health exhibit on the spot within 3½ weeks.

The major problem in planning the exhibit was to encompass the tremendously varied and complex story of American health within manageable visual form. We started with several basic assumptions: (a) the story was not to be told chauvinistically but in a spirit of sensible candor which presented what has been done and what remains to be done in the United States; (b) the exhibit was to include as many elements of public health and medicine in this country as possible, rather than cover the work of a single profession, group, or institution, within or outside government; (c) because of its wide scope, the story had to be presented impressionistically rather than literally.

The decision was made, therefore, to classify health work in the United States under four broad areas of activity: prevention, treatment of the sick and disabled, medical and hospital care, and control of the environment.

To round out the story of American health which the exhibit simply outlined, we relied on a group of young American college students employed in the United States Pavilion to serve as guides, to answer questions, and to describe aspects of American life not fully pictured. These guides were thoroughly briefed and were given fact sheets which contained more detailed information than the displays included.

The theme of the entire exhibit was summed up in the opening panel of the first building:

"Better health is one of man's brightest dreams.

From the beginning, man has fought pestilence, disease, suffering, and premature death.

The face of the enemy is changing . . . from death-dealing scourges to diseases that maim and disable.

The weapons have changed . . . from nostrums to miraculous drugs and the skills of modern medicine.

The scene is changing . . . from the pace of rural life to the tempo of great cities.

But the struggle endures and better health



Photographs (*left*) illustrate hospital and medical care in the United States. Exhibit (*right*) traces the development of antibiotics from bread mold to the final product in the symbolic petri dish. Tree bears a quotation from Psalm 67, "The earth has yielded its increase . . ."

for each nation remains among mankind's great unfinished tasks.

This is a story of how the battle for better health is being carried on in America and something of the great challenges that lie ahead . . ."

The interior of the first building used the concept of a crumpled newspaper with headlines indicating some of our national problems in health and medicine. The nature of these problems was merely suggested by four photographs illustrating the broad fronts in the fight against illness: prevention, treatment, medical care, and control of the environment.

The second building was devoted to visual treatment of these four broad themes by specific examples which showed, not literally but impressionistically, America's accomplishments and future tasks. Throughout the accompanying text the linkage of medical science in the United States to the scientific accomplishments of other nations was indicated.

A summary of the present health status in the United States introduced the visitor to the second building. A light box containing a color photograph depicted in a series of 15-second flashing light sequences the average size of the various groups in the American family from

1900 to the present. The text pointed out that in 1900 a child at birth could expect to live 46 years; but in 1958, a child at birth can expect to live 67 years, or well into the 21st century.

Opposite the light box was a model of a beating heart, used as a symbol of health. The accompanying text pointed out that in the United States certain of mankind's ancient enemies have been conquered: malaria, typhoid fever, smallpox, diphtheria, pellagra. Others, however, remain: cancer, heart disease, arthritis, mental illness, dental diseases, and the problems of the modern environment.

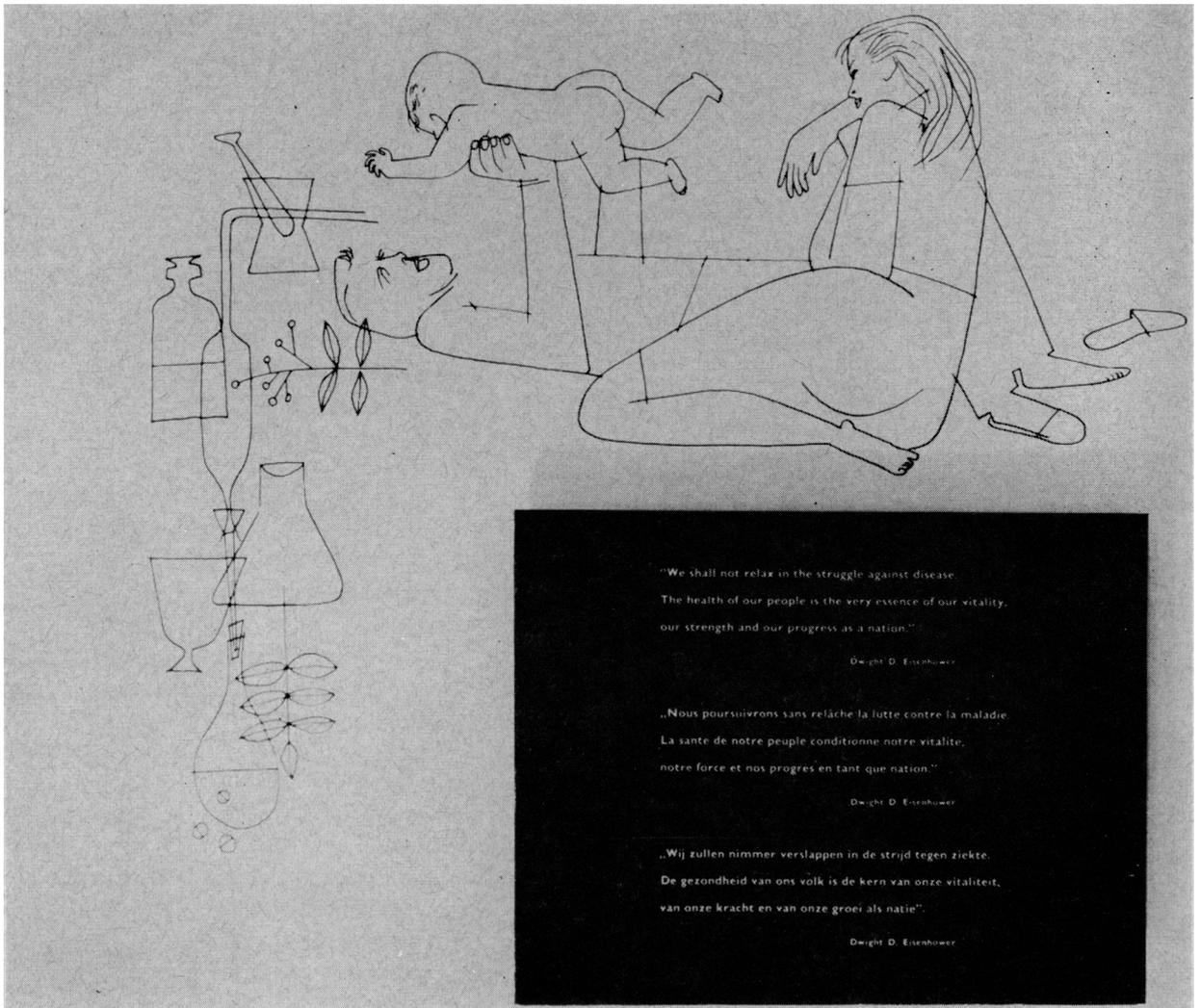
The section on prevention highlighted the development of the poliomyelitis vaccine, one American story which is well known throughout much of the world. Photographs traced the story from its beginning through research, trial, application, and results. A chart showed the Nation's progress against this disease during the past 4 years. The guides were asked to point out that within weeks after the vaccine proved successful, the United States made its formula known to all the nations of the world.

The Salk vaccine story also illustrated the promise of medical research. "Medical research," an accompanying legend read, "on which the U. S. currently spends over \$400 million annually is a first line of defense. Through the work of scientists the world over, the dark mystery of cancer, the cause of heart disease, and other illnesses will one day be uncovered."

The guides pointed out that Congress, over the past 10 years, has voted increasing amounts for medical research, principally for grants to universities, medical schools, hospitals, and other research laboratories. Industry, universities, and private foundations were credited with their part in this national endeavor.

The guides were coached to emphasize the international character of research, citing the long and illustrious list of scientists from dozens of nations who have contributed to American and world progress in health. This information permitted visitors to identify themselves and their countries with the march of health.

A series of photographs under the general heading of prevention demonstrated another phase of research and its application, the use



The health objectives of the United States were summed up in a quotation from President Eisenhower: "We shall not relax in the struggle against disease. The health of our people is the very essence

of our vitality, our strength and our progress as a nation." The panel containing the statement in three languages was in the building devoted to health in the future.

of sodium fluoride to prevent dental caries. The fluoride story was chosen not only because it is illustrative of research applied to human health but also because of the wide prevalence of dental caries abroad and the fact that fluoridation of community water supplies is a simple, inexpensive method of cutting down measurably on such defects.

The exhibit showed the source of antibiotics, simple molds; how they are refined and mass produced; their tremendous variety; how they are administered; and the diseases against which they have been most effective.

The section on treatment, also presented in terms of accomplishment and of challenge, illustrated the story of antibiotics. For the world of science the antibiotics are a triumph of research; for the United States they are a triumph, as well, of mass production methods.

The text stated: "In 1929, a brilliant English scientist, Sir Alexander Fleming, discovered penicillin. Since then, thousands of new drugs and many new medical techniques have given hope to millions and relieved untold human suffering. As long as needless deaths occur, medicine's great challenges remain."

The guides could again point out the international character of research and its infinite

promise for mankind. They were asked, for example, to tell visitors of the successful use of antibiotics against yaws in Haiti. Similarly, it was suggested that they mention the conquest of malaria in the United States, and the worldwide malaria eradication campaign now being undertaken through the World Health Organization.

The section on care covered rehabilitation of the ill or handicapped and American progress in developing hospital and medical facilities. "Hospitals are needed for a growing population," the accompanying text read, "and for the care of the elderly whose numbers, in America as in other lands, are steadily increasing. Funds voted by the Congress of the United States or contributed by individual Americans have built thousands of hospitals in recent years. More are being built; more are needed."

In this field, the guides were briefed on the steadily rising level of medical care in America brought about by research, new drugs, new methods of surgery, improved medical and public health practice, and perhaps most important and basic to this rise, the sustained public interest in the improvement of health. They were also given information on the accomplishments of the joint Federal-State-local hospital construction program and on the health and medical care problems of an aging population.

Among a wide range of possible subjects, two—water pollution and air pollution—which are common to industrialized nations, were chosen to illustrate control of the environment.

Two brief statements accompanied the pictures: "As great cities grow, so do the hazards of environment. Pittsburgh, Pa., America's 'smoky city,' has cleaned up its air. Both air and water pollution are unfinished tasks for other cities in the U. S. and throughout the world." And, "Wastes from industrial plants and over-taxed disposal systems in growing suburban areas contribute to polluted rivers. Many thousands of streams and lakes provide good clean water. The job of restoring many other rivers is a big one—a task in which Ameri-

can industry, local communities, and the Federal Government are cooperating."

Three "before and after" photographs of Pittsburgh illustrated accomplishments in reducing air pollution. The environment section provided an opportunity for the guides to discuss briefly other subjects such as sanitation, personal hygiene, the safety of water and milk supplies, and the safety and quality of food and drugs.

The third building suggested the world toward which we are moving, a world in which the great diseases will have yielded to the impact of research, control measures, better care of the ill and the handicapped, and increasing control over the environment.

An important part of this section showed the pattern in which health services are provided to the people of the United States. It is a partnership of the many: the health professions, voluntary agencies, universities and research centers, hospitals and clinics, citizens groups, and local, State, and Federal Governments.

America's health objectives for the future were summed up in two brief panels. The first panel contained a quotation from President Eisenhower: "We shall not relax in the struggle against disease. The health of our people is the very essence of our vitality, our strength and our progress as a nation."

This statement on the importance of health, equally relevant to all nations, sums up the value that Americans place on this intimately human need.

On the opposite panel there was a statement of objectives which embodies both the domestic ideal and the concept of America's role in relationship to other nations:

"To continue, through research and improved public health and medical practice, the fight against suffering and premature death in America . . .

"To help pursue, through the World Health Organization and other means, the search for a healthier world."